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INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001641

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/19

TAGS: PREL SMIG KCRM PTER FUN GR

SUBJECT: FRONTEX PRESENCE GROWING TO CONFRONT GREECE'S MIGRATION WAVE

REF: ATHENS 1503; ATHENS 1471

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CLASSIFIED BY: Deborah McCarthy, DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

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¶1. (SBU) In keeping with one of its main social (and now security) challenges - the growing tide of illegal migrants arriving by sea after transiting Turkey - Greece has sought greater support from the EU, and has found a partner in FRONTEX, the EU's border security agency. FRONTEX has become increasingly active and visible, reflecting the organization's assessment that Greece is "the main entry point for illegal immigrants into Europe." The Aegean-based Operation Poseidon is FRONTEX's largest operation, and EU member states are steadily increasing their contributions of personnel and resources. FRONTEX currently has about 40 guest officers present in Greece at any time, rotating in on one-month TDYs. But this presence remains relatively small compared to the size of the migration flows and the large amount of Greek coastline in the Aegean. It is also making news, including because of several incidents of harassment by Turkish radar operators. End Summary.

An Increasing Presence at the "Gate of Europe"

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¶2. (U) Visiting Athens in October, FRONTEX Deputy Executive Director Gil Arias Fernandez told the press that Greece "remains the main entry point for illegal immigrants in Europe." Asked how the situation compared to other EU border states, Arias Fernandez said that in 2008 and 2009, "the numbers of illegal arrivals to the Canary Islands, for example, dropped significantly and this trend has started to spread across the Mediterranean region." He said that, in contrast, the number of illegal arrivals in Greece increased in both 2008 and 2009, with an increasing proportion of them coming by sea. Asked to explain why the trend in Greece was moving in the opposite direction of other Mediterranean members of the EU, Arias Fernandez cited Italy's and Spain's cooperation with third countries: repatriation pacts with Libya and Senegal, deployment of Spanish police officers to Africa, and patrols of third countries' territorial waters. He noted that Greece had been unable to achieve this kind of cooperation with Turkey - the transit country from which most of the seaborne aliens enter Greece - and he expressed hope that the EU and Turkey would conclude an

alien readmission agreement that would take the place of the ineffectively implemented 2001 Greece-Turkey readmission protocol.

¶3. (C) Lieutenant Colonel Alexandros Soukoulis, the Greek Police focal point for FRONTEX issues, gave us an informal review of FRONTEX activities. They include several sea and land border operations, including Operation Poseidon, the biggest FRONTEX operation anywhere in Europe. Poseidon is renewed annually each December and is constantly evolving and expanding, with over ten countries currently providing personnel and other assets. Other current FRONTEX operations focus on airports and land crossing points. Greece is incorporating the FRONTEX-established common core curriculum into its officer training.

¶4. (C) Soukoulis said the Greek border is a top priority for FRONTEX. EU member states are increasingly aware of the situation in Greece and its impact on them, and have been contributing more and more resources. Soukoulis estimated that, at present, there were about 40 guest officers from other EU countries in Greece under FRONTEX. Each officer stayed for approximately one month and, with the planes and boats their countries provided, engaged in surveillance, interception, and other activities. The officers travel with at least one Greek officer to ensure that their activities are covered by Greek law. Asked about Turkey, Soukoulis said in his view, in the mindset there, the military - rather than law enforcement - have the main responsibility for border security. It is the contrary in Greece.

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Aegean Squabbles

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¶5. (C) Over the course of the second half of 2009, and increasingly in the past two months, Turkish radar operators have contacted FRONTEX aircraft passing over Agathonisi and Farmakonisi (which lie on the patrol route between the islands of Samos and Kos, an area that is a prime entry point for illegals), and warned them they were in "Turkish" airspace, threatening them with fighter intercept should they not deviate course. During his October visit to Athens, FRONTEX Deputy Fernandez categorically stated to the press that EU aircraft had never entered Turkish airspace, a point repeated by EU Commission VP for Justice, Freedom, and Security Jacques Barrot, while noting that FRONTEX aircraft had never been "threatened" by Turkey.

Comment

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¶6. (C) Greece sees the huge and growing influx of people coming through the Aegean as one of its most important challenges, and it has sought for some time to get EU institutions to treat this as a shared European problem. Though the capacity of FRONTEX remains limited, for the Greeks it is a step in the right direction. These efforts are complicated, however, by the huge size of the challenge, the difficulties in intra-EU coordination, and Greek-Turkish differences over managing a major human smuggling route that passes through both countries. While the recent outreach efforts by Greece to Turkey will certainly include a discussion on this issue, the size of the flow is great and the impact of FRONTEX still too early to determine.  
Speckhard